



GRAZE FOR PROFIT: Bill Abercrombie and his sons built a confinement dairy. Now they think grazing may be more profitable.

Strength in grazing

By PAM GOLDEN

WHEN Bill Abercrombie's sons said they wanted to be farmers, the three went to work building a confinement dairy.

Some years later, Matthew is a full-time dairyman; Greg is a full-time Morgan County, Ala., commissioner and a part-time dairyman. Bill, who was a full-time school principal and part-time farmer, now is a full-time dairyman. And the cows no longer are confined.

"We can be totally confined," Bill Abercrombie says. "We can keep every cow in the barn if we want to. But for herd health, they do better out here."

Actually, they can keep three herds in the barn. They built a 600-head confinement operation, but they've dropped to 200 head to survive the current economy.

"With the price of milk right now

Key Points

- North Alabama part-time farmer built a dairy with his sons.
- The confinement operation is moving toward grazing.
- Grazing offers improved herd health and lower costs.

we don't want to be at capacity," Abercrombie says. "We're just trying to get through hard times."

In addition to improved herd health, which significantly cuts costs and labor, Abercrombie says increased grazing cuts their feed bill. "Cottonseed and other commodities are so high; that's one of the things we're doing to cut on buying commodities," he says. "We cut our feed consumption in half and didn't have any change in milk."

The Abercrombies' Jersey-Holstein

crosses generally yield about 40 to 50 pounds of milk.

"The Jersey crosses don't produce as much milk as some other ones, but our butter fat is always good," Abercrombie says. "It's between 3.75 and 4. We don't ever worry about our butter fat."

Additionally, the Jersey crosses produce longer.

"We thought if we crossed it might add some longevity to the herd," Abercrombie says. "And it does."

With cows that live longer and a grazing system that drops the cost of herd maintenance, Abercrombie figures the farm's longevity also improves.

"We're going to have to buy some cows to get our numbers up after we get through this," he says. "Right now we're feeling our way through, not just the hard times, but what we want to do since Greg took that job [as county commissioner]."

Stockpiled fescue provides alternative to hay

By WALT PREVATT, DON BALL and MIKE DAVIS

Stockpiling fescue for late fall and early winter grazing is a profitable forage management alternative most years. Stockpiling fescue to accumulate forage growth involves taking your cows off of fescue pasture in late August or early September and applying nitrogen fertilizer for additional fescue forage production. Research has shown that fall stockpiled fescue is of high quality and can be fed at lower cost than traditional Southern grass hay.

Fescue pasture can be managed different ways in the fall: grazed, har-

vested for hay or stockpiled for later grazing. Fescue's unique production and quality characteristics allow it to be stockpiled for later use without appreciably compromising quality (crude protein and total digestible nutrients). This management alternative provides both a lower-cost and a higher-quality feedstuff when compared to average-quality hay, which should improve the performance and profitability of your cow herd.

Management plan

A stockpiled fescue management plan includes these steps:

- Closely graze or mow fescue pasture in late August or early September.
- Apply between 40 and 80 pounds

of N fertilizer before September ends.

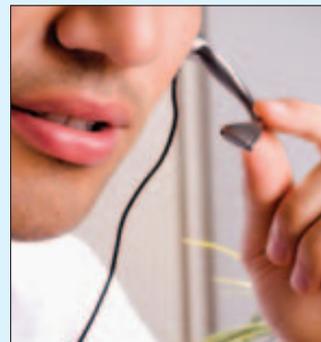
■ Keep cows off of fescue pasture until grazing is needed.

■ Use some form of controlled or limit grazing management practice.

Depending on the specific farm situation and location, these management practices may need to be adjusted. Also, adequate soil moisture is necessary for a reasonable level of forage production. Consult your local county Extension agent for specific information for your area.

Prevatt, Ball and Davis are with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. Prevatt is an economist. Ball is a forage specialist. Davis is a regional agent.

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